



**United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors
Office of Inspector General**

Inspection of Embassy Conakry, Guinea



Exterior of Embassy Conakry

The embassy is properly focused on strengthening Guinea's civil society and existing institutions to maximize the chances for a peaceful political transition when the long reign of Guinea's current president ends. The embassy is rightsized for its goals, and its reporting on political and economic developments is excellent.

The Ambassador brought strong analytical and organizational skills to Conakry, and in his first year has paid appropriate attention to, and helped improve, important security and management issues. Interagency coordination is exceptional. The Ambassador should now consider shifting to a less top-down management style to improve internal communication. A new deputy chief of mission has already demonstrated the skills to create a new, healthy channel for productive, two-way information flow and teamwork.

Although the International Cooperative Administrative Support Services council and the housing committee are working well, the Office of Inspector General informally recommended that Embassy Conakry maintain a single housing pool in accordance with Department regulations. Many mission personnel fault the management section's leadership for inattention to customer concerns.

The lack of a supplemental retirement program is of great concern to Foreign Service nationals in Conakry. The Guinean government has been inconsistent in the extreme in disbursing retirement pay to former Foreign Service nationals in spite of embassy demarches on the subject. Embassy Conakry has three proposals for a supplemental retirement program, and they are being translated. That translation needs to be completed quickly and the regional human resources officer needs to review the proposals and forward them to Washington for review, approval, and funding. Embassy management needs to communicate with the Foreign Service national community that this effort is underway.

The single largest infrastructure challenge is electrical power. Frequent power outages, energy spikes, and the lack of grounded connections pose health and safety concerns. Although several past reviews highlighted the problem, the mission has not resolved long-standing discrepancies in its property inventory. However, the post's planning for its move to a new embassy compound is well advanced and appropriate.

Background



Map of Guinea

Guinea, with a wealth of natural resources, should be self-sustaining and prosperous. Instead it is poor and ill governed and faces a problematic future. Because of President Lansana Conté's chronic illnesses and his inability to govern full time, Guinea's near-term future is uncertain.

If the nation's political stability is maintained, economic and budgetary reform will have the next highest priority. Mining and fishing could provide a healthy tax base for Guinea, but a significant portion of these revenues remains "off budget." As a result, the nation's central bank is broke, the infrastructure of the country is in ruins, and the vast majority of the population lives with open sewers, no clean water, and little electricity. The literacy rate in Guinea is only about 20 percent. Life expectancy for men is 55 and 54 for women. Inflation was running at 60 percent in the first nine months of 2005.

Western analysts in Conakry believe the country is on the brink of ruin. President Conté's selection of a reformist Prime Minister in December 2004 may be a response to donor country demand for reform, but reform will have to be genuine. Should Conté become unable to lead before reforms take hold, the army will maintain stability but only if the army resists its internal generational and ethnic divides.

Conakry is without question one of the most challenging hardship posts in Africa. Urban squalor, canalized traffic, daily power outages, seasonal water shortages, and isolation all make life difficult. The lack of acceptable health facilities outside the embassy and the lack of recreational facilities adversely affect the American community. On the plus side, Guineans like Americans and are friendly, and radical Islam appears to have made little headway in Guinea.

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Office of Inspector General

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